

**William Dunbar to Thomas Jefferson, October 21,  
1803, from Thomas Jefferson and Early Western  
Explorers, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt,  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

**William Dunbar to Thomas Jefferson**

Natchez 21st. October 1803

Dear Sir

I have been honored with your letter of the 21st Ult. and now make haste to reply to its contents. The information you have recieved relative to the re-annexation (by the Spanish Govt.) of that part of W. Florida lying between the Mississippi and river Perdido is perhaps incorrect: The Stile and title of the Spanish Govr. (up to the present time) has been Governor General of the two Provinces of Louisiana and W. Florida; the Govr. of Pensacola has always been Subordinate to, and under the immediate orders of the Govr. Genl. of the two provinces. I have every reason to believe that the distinction of East and West Florida has continued to Subsist under the Spanish Govr. as it was received from the British, and that the jurisdiction of the Govr. of St. Augustin did never extend beyond the limits of british East Florida; it certainly never comprehended Pensacola which was a part of ancient Spanish Florida: one or two Circumstances nevertheless occur to my mind which might induce an idea that a portion of W. Florida had been consolidated with Louisiana. The command of the opposite banks of the Mississippi within or rather on the Western boundary of british W. Florida has ever been united (since the cession by the british) in the person of the Same Commandant as if belonging to the Same province; this is however by no means conclusive: a stronger Circumstance is the following. Before the conquest of W. Florida by the Spanish arms, a Surveyor General of Louisiana was in

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Commission; and when warrants were afterwards issued by Government for the Survey of lands on the east side of the Mississippi, they were directed to the Surveyor

general of Louisiana; no mention has ever been made of W. Florida in those warrants of Survey, the lands being Stated to be Situated in the District of Baton rouge or Natchez. No surveyor was ever appointed expressly for W. Florida. The Subordinate Surveyors were all deputies of the Surveyor General of Louisiana, and as it was after impossible to procure such as were qualified, concessions of land have very often remained without Survey or been badly done by Commandants or their Servants. You have probably been furnished with a Copy of the orders of the Spanish Court, to the Govr. and Intendant of Louisiana, yo deliver up the province to the french Commissioner. Being uncertain, I enclose you a Copy thereof taken from a faithful copy drawn from the original by the Writer; from which it will be seen that it was properly Louisiana under the Spanish Govt. was to have been delivered up to the french republic: the explanation given by the Spanish officers at New Orleans has been, that Spain was to deliver no more to France than what She had received from her, & that consequently the whole of british W. Florida was to be retained; upon this point the french Prefect differed widely from them, claiming ancient Louisiana as it formerly existed under the french dominion, So far as it now continues in the possession of Spain; and write to his government on the Subject; declaring with french confidence that an application from the chief Consul to the Court of Spain would speedily rectify the errors of its officers.

In my account of indian nations within the province of Louisiana, I have stated that they are few in number and

harmless; this is to be understood only of such divisions of the province as are partially inhabited by the Whites; but if my conjectures are well founded, that its barriers extend to the Northern Andes, we remain completely in the dark, as to the Aboriginal Tribes which are scattered over that immense region; a few only are imperfectly known to us; they

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inhabit the banks of the Missouri and some of its (almost) innumerable branches. Those I observe are detailed by Mr. Clark in his letter by last mail to Mr. Maddison.

I remark with Satisfaction that by the same occasions Mr. Clark has communicated many useful hints to the Secretary of State respecting the people of Louisiana, their characters, their ignorance and their prejudices, which will furnish them with very false ideas of the nature of the government & courts of Justice which they are to expect from us. I have reflected upon this Subject, but have always been disinclined to obtrude any opinions not pointedly called for, much less to amuse you with Speculative ideas, which perhaps are false in theory and might lead (in practice) to evils of greater magnitude than those which they were erroneously calculated to obviate: I have furnished our Delegate Mr. Lattimore with some reflections on Courts and on men of the law; which reflections I Know to be very crude, but will convey the idea of an evil which is rapidly growing up in this Country to an enormous magnitude; fortunate will be the lot of the new province if by any means She may escape so great a Scourge: to me it is evident that the period is fast approaching when the Men of the Law will be the Lords & nobility of this Country and the Planters will be their Vassals; they will then govern us with despotic sway. The Governor of our territory deeply impressed with

the importance of this Subject, proposes, I believe to second those ideas in his future Communications with Government. I have written to Mr. Clark on the Same topic, proposing that the Louisianians should send an intelligent Agent to Congress in order to State the Situation and Circumstances of the New Province and its Inhabitants before the Sage Legislators of our Nation; but he informs me, the Spanish Govt. will not permit any Such measures to be publickly taken while the reins of Govt. remain in their hands.

I am with the highest respect, Your Obedient & devoted Servant,

William Dunbar

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